

This article features prominently in Google searches for Earl de Blonville. The journalist, Ms. Egan clearly took Earl's statements at face value. The boxes below tell the rest of the story.

Renaissance man: Earl de Blonville

The insatiable quest for discovery has led explorer Earl de Blonville into the world of words.

By Joanna Egan • December 8, 2010 • Reading Time: 10 Minutes



Earl leading a private exploration of West Greenland, with a crew of wealthy businessmen, 1988.

Inquiries to the "wealthy businessmen" (two brothers) as to how the trip went have not been answered. One would imagine that if they all had a great time, they would be eager to tell the story.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY Renaissance man is someone who's adept at using an ice axe but can summit a peak without one; who feels at home navigating white-water rivers in a kayak; who has the unyielding urge to sail to the ends of the Earth; and who can confidently pen their tales of adventure upon their safe return. Sixty-year-old Australian explorer Earl de Blonville fits the profile.

Driven by curiosity rather than the desire to conquer, Earl's lifetime of mountain instructing and white water kayaking has seen him travel the world seeking opportunities for exploration and discovery. Along the way he's clocked up an impressive resume of first ascents, and an equally inspiring list of first descents. He completed the first sea kayak circumnavigation of Tasmania in 1979 and was the first to paddle south to north across Bass Strait. In 1986 he launched Australia's first private Arctic expedition, a sailing and kayaking journey that later encouraged business executives to step into an unfamiliar realm to develop new leadership skills.

Actually, Earl was part of a group that paddled Bass Strait. The launching of the 1986 expedition was also a group effort. It is all too typical that when Earl talks about himself, he is the center of the universe.

Now complementing his expeditions with corporate speaking and leadership coaching, Earl hopes to share his spirit of adventure with explorers and businesspeople alike. In 2010 he published *Seventh Journey*, an account of his adventures (and misadventures) in the Arctic and he hopes to head back to East Greenland this year to embark on a new expedition and to work on a number of book and film projects.

Not one of the agencies that represents Earl as a speaker can identify and actual occasion when they booked him to speak for pay.

Seventh Journey was self-published, something he never mentions. He also never mentions that no one from the expedition had any input on the book. Expedition members have nothing good to say about Earl's leadership and the aftermath of the expedition.

What inspired you to become an explorer, kayaker and mountain instructor?

I was a boy growing up in the bush with no running water or electricity and certainly no entertainment, so I spent a lot of time by myself. I developed a sense of self-reliance and a fascination with what lies around the corner, or in the next valley, or over the next hill; I had a childhood of incredible freedoms. When I was 11 I moved from the bush to the beach and started solo sea kayaking; I saw this old lump of a kayak and I bought it with my pocket money, did it up, and used to go out surfing and sailing with it. I was a very independent little kid, and when I was a bit older I became involved in Outward Bound, which led me into mountain instructing.

Earl was abandoned by his mother, sent to live with a grandfather, an event he claims to be proud of. One does not need a degree in psychology to recognize that an abandoned child will fervently seek attention throughout their lives.

Did you attribute the origins of climbing career to Outward Bound?

Yes. I started rock climbing formerly at Outward Bound, and I used to work with the director there as an assistant climbing instructor. He was a very good climber; he climbed a lot of the tough parts of Kilimanjaro and made a number of first ascents in Australia. He was the first to climb Balls Pyramid, a peak near Lord Howe Island, which was a pretty pioneering effort. He said it was like climbing on Weet Bix, where you had to keep the holds together with your hand so they all didn't just crumble away.

This is a bizarre response. In the second sentence, suddenly it's all about the director and the director's accomplishments.



Earl on sweep oar leading the first commercial raft descent of the Himalayan river Sun Kosi that runs from Tibet to India.

The owner of Peregrine Expeditions, where Earl worked as a rafting guide at the time the Sun Kosi was run has confirmed that Earl's claim, illustrated here, is false.

Since then you've done a number of first ascents...

Yes, well in Austria a friend and I made a few first Australian ascents. We climbed the highest mountain there, and we made some good climbs – also first Australian ascents – in the Dolomites in Italy. I climbed Mt. Ida, which is one of the highest points in Greece, on the island of Crete. I just happened to be over there and fell in love with Crete, and when I was walking around during the winter I saw the peak, and although I had no climbing gear with me at the time – no crampons, ropes or ice screws, just an old ice axe – I just decided I was going to climb Mount Ida if I had a direct route. It is completely covered in snow and ice in wintertime, oddly enough; it's a pretty serious snow and ice climb right in the middle of the Mediterranean, so I climbed it solo without any gear whatsoever. It was a long and difficult climb and I was nearly killed on the climb down when the whole of the snow face began to move.

First Australian ascents???? How in the heck would Earl know that other Australians hadn't proceeded him? The highest mountain in Austria is a WALK UP. Earl has been publicly derisive of people who claim "firsts" and yet here he is stretching to award himself a "first". It's rather like claiming the first ascent of a non-technical climb by "a blue-eyed Caucasian sign painter" and then crowing about it to a journalist.

Were you frightened when that happened?

No, but I was very surprised. When I get into very, very difficult situations, I talk to myself, and I had to do that then. I talk myself into being very focused, and almost take over as a second person and tell the first person what to do. That works for me, I did it then and it kept me alive. I've since read about a study in Canada, where a group of athletes talk themselves into a much higher level of performance.

A simple Google search on "climb Ida crete winter" shows that it's a common and straightforward climb, particularly with proper gear. Again, Earl has no evidence to support the notion, which he claims in other print, that he did the first Australian ascent of Ida in winter. It's preposterous to claim something like that. And, as a professional climbing instructor, he put himself foolishly in danger and now frames it as a great accomplishment.

Tell me about the white water descents you did in the French Alps...

Well I was working as a professional mountaineering instructor in Scotland and North Wales and there was a bunch of us there, all instructors, and we said, "Let's go for a trip!" So we all chucked our money in, got a mini-bus, put all the kayaks on our boat trailer and hauled it over to the French Alps. There are some monumentally big rivers there and we'd organized to go paddling with the local white water kayak club. When we got there in early summer, there had actually been a lot of rain. Not only was there heavy snowfall during the previous winter, but there'd also been a lot of rain, which meant that all the rivers were really big and quite a few of the big rapids that we knew of were actually washed out, they just didn't exist anymore. That also meant that quite a few rivers that almost never ran, were running, and there was one in particular that hadn't run for years but was now a very serious white water river. So we pulled into town, we went to the kayak club and they said, "This is way too dangerous; we're not going out in these kinds of conditions." But we went anyway, and we did some spectacular rivers in south of the Alps, rivers that flow right down to the Mediterranean. We were there for a couple of weeks hitting some big water, and it was one of the best trips I've ever done simply because it was tough, it was pioneering and it was a lot of fun.

Given Earl's well documented penchant for self promoting hyperbole it would be great to see some names of the other instructors who could corroborate these river trips.

You've done some pioneering sea kayak journeys in Australia as well. You were the first to circumnavigate Tassie...

That's right. Yes, it was 1979. I thought it was my idea, but I met another guy and he said, "That's funny I've had that idea as well." So we did it together, and we were both pretty determined, hard-headed guys, so it was almost a trip with two leaders, but he was bigger and tougher than me so I let him make the decisions. Of course, before we headed off there was a lot of stuff in the newspapers calling us suicidal. One local expert commented: "It would be too suicidal, don't do it. Tell them not to do it." That got put into the newspapers, and cost us a lot of sponsorship on the spot, but we did it anyway, and during the trip, we got caught in the biggest west coast storm in living memory. We had 70-foot waves breaking over the headland and I've still got the photos to prove it, but we basically went round without incident. And now sea kayakers come to Australia from around the world, because to circumnavigate Tassie is considered the acid test of top level sea kayakers.

Again, Classic Earl. The "other guy" has a name but Earl never mentions it. In fact, he regularly gives the impression it was a solo trip. The other guy's name is John Brewster. And at the time of the trip, Earl was still named Earle Bloomfield. He had not yet adopted the ancestral relatives name de Blonville.

What's it like to paddle in those conditions?

Well there's an awful lot of wind and an awful lot of sand blowing around. The tent gets blown flat and the kayaks are buried by sand. So all you can really do is hide in the bush and wait for the winds to go away. And then wait for the seas to die down, and then just get on with the job. Storms come and go.



Earl using the swell to rip him through a narrow gutter on Phillip Island.

How important is it for you to head out on these kinds of adventures?

The difference, I guess, between adventure and exploration is that an adventure is often just a quest for thrills, whereas exploration involves looking for answers. So I've always been an explorer insofar as I'm driven by curiosity. I don't have an ambition to stand on the summit of the world's eight tallest peaks or to be able to say that I've done them. I mean, if I was climbing in the Andes and found a cave halfway up to the summit that was full of mummified bodies, I'd forget the climb because I'd be much more interested in how those mummies got up there. So I'm always driven by curiosity, though of course there are times curiosity takes you to some strange places and there are times when things get tough and you have to fall back on your inner resources. Certainly I've had a lot of those experiences, but I didn't set out to do that. You don't set out to do that, but it's nice to know that if you do get overcome by some unexpected bad weather shall we say, that you can cope with whatever mother nature throws at you.

What holds you together when things get tough?

Camaraderie and teamwork. When you stick together with your expedition team like a band of brothers, you discover incredible powers of survival and resilience that you never realised you had. Nobody knows how they're going to pull up when times get really tough, so it's important to get out and do things so that you begin to discover yourself in difficult circumstances.

The irony of this heart warming sentiment about "band of brothers" would not be lost on the other members of the 86 kayak expedition. The expedition was rife with acrimony, power plays by Earl and even some fisticuffs.

You lead executive expeditions now...

I led Australia's first executive expedition. I had a ship up in Greenland on the west coast, so I got together four guys, four multimillionaires and said, "Right, well we're going to make the first Australian exploration of west Greenland. The ship is up there. I'll go up and fix it up, you fly in, and off we'll go." So that's what we did. They drove the boat. They did the navigation. We went up into the ice cap and explored some interesting areas, including the area where the berg came from that sank the Titanic, and we had a fantastic journey. The purpose of that sort of an expedition is actually to throw the learning and the experience back onto their shoulders so that they come back and say, "We did it." Not that somebody else showed them what to do. I've got another trip that I'm thinking of taking next year which is designed to give people the experience of leading an expedition themselves. So we'll set things up to enable each person to lead for a week. They'll get to make all of the errors and fix all of the problems that they create and learn the hard way. That's the kind of learning that you can't get anywhere else on Earth.

So who were the "four multimillionaires"? What do THEY have to say about their experience of Earl as an executive coach? Earl did attempt to sell additional "Arctic Explorer" executive expeditions. They never happened. You can see the sales material he created in 2011 and 2016 appended at the bottom of this document.

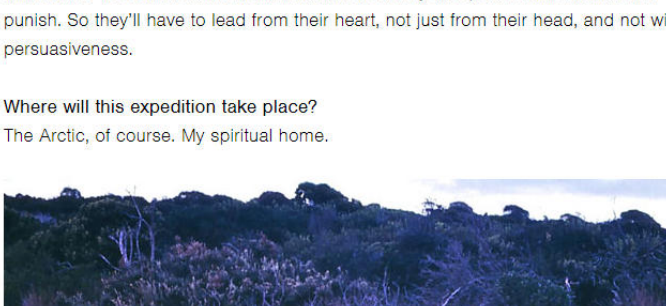
And will you intervene if everything starts to fall apart?

Nope. They can fix it themselves. And the other three leaders of course will have to bite their tongues so as not to override the person who is leading. And of course they'll be the ones who actually learn the most, not the guy who is leading. They'll all have to be business leaders to get onto the trip, and they'll learn about themselves as leaders without the benefits of money and power and influence, or the ability to promote or punish. So they'll have to lead from their heart, not just from their head, and not with authority but with persuasiveness.

Earl's fascination with being a leadership/business guru is a huge part of his self-written narrative. In fact, Earl has consistently failed at business. His playground installation company in England either closed or was taken over. Earl claims he was cheated out of millions of dollars. His book sales are a flop. Not a single person has come forward to sing the praises of his C-Suite coaching. Earl apparently lives on the dot, an Australian government pensioner. So all this talk about being a leadership/business guru needs to be taken with plenty of salt.

Where will this expedition take place?

The Arctic, of course. My spiritual home.



Earl bivouacking on the beach during a sea kayak expedition.

You're drawn to the Arctic. What attracted you to it in the first place?

The first time I was up there was in '85, and in all I've made six trips there. I was attracted to go there by reading about a young English explorer called Gino Watkins. He was an extraordinary fellow. He actually invented the down filled sleeping bag and the dome shaped tent, so I guess you could call him the patron saint of a good night's sleep. He was quite original in his thinking and led expeditions to East Greenland. On his second trip he disappeared without a trace whilst hunting seals in his kayak. For some bizarre reason I felt that I just had to go to Greenland to retrace his Journey. So I was initially inspired to go to Greenland because of reading about this extraordinary young English explorer, Gino Watkins, and then as a result, I discovered I felt at home there.

Retracing Gino's route on which he disappeared was the theme of the 86 expedition. According to expedition members, Earl was so taken with the mythology of Gino that he took up smoking a pipe (like Gino) and dropped his Aussie accent for an English one. This was source of some amusement to the other expedition members.

Do you plan to go back there?

Yes. I'm heading back next year to do a pilgrimage to Desperation Island and rediscover where I was 25 years ago, and also to write a book on survival. I plan to write about my survival story, and also four other very interesting survival stories that took place in East Greenland. There's something about east Greenland and west Greenland that reminds me of my incredibly free childhood. You can go where you want, you can do what you want, you can just make it all up and people respect you for who you are not how much money you've got or what you do, but who you are as a man. And equally you meet some most extraordinary people.

Earl did not go back to Desperation Island and did not write any of the books he says he was going to write.

And it's largely undiscovered as well, isn't it?

Well, I mean they've mapped it, but as soon as you get a little bit away from habitation you're in a complete wilderness that hasn't changed dramatically in the last however many hundred thousand years. You can live quite well in the wilderness, just live off your wits and there's food for the taking and living is a sustainable lifestyle. And I think the Inuit people, certainly on the west coast, have got a lot to teach us about sustainability. And that's the intended subject of another book I plan to write after I'm done with leadership and survival, it will look at sustainability through the eyes of the Inuit people. Writing it will require living with them for a period of time, and there's still plenty of Inuit hunters who just live entirely off the land. I want to find out what we can learn from these people that can guide us toward our quest for more sustainability, which would of course mean moving away from consumerism and brand identification and all the rest of it, and looking at the qualities within ourselves, finding out what matters.

Ah! yet another book in the works! Again, Earl never returned and lived off the land like the Inuit.

How does it feel to be a role model?

Looking back, I can see that I have encouraged many people I've come into contact with to reach for their greater selves, and I've inspired lots of people to do things that they otherwise didn't think they could. Years ago I met an extraordinary young man who wanted to get into outdoor education and I had to go and talk to his parents to encourage them to let him do it. Now he's running a \$15 million business in outdoor education, training 30,000 students a year around the country. He said that if it wasn't for me he wouldn't have done that. But like me, he can't think I'm any sort of role model. I don't know any parents who'd want their kids to be like me.

And in the blink of an eye, with no actual segue, Earl is a "role model". Then later on we learn...wait...not so fast. Everyone, even Donald Trump has an occasional slip of the tongue and reveals something tidbit of truth. I am guessing that Earl's various wives and girlfriends would concur with the final sentence.

What advice would you give to young explorers?

Well, my advice would be to trust your intuition, have faith in yourself and if you can think of it, you can do it. And in our evidence-based society, don't start looking for reasons why you should do it, just do it. Somebody said to me, life is a hard teacher; it gives you the experience first and the lesson afterward. You can't learn to swim unless you're in the deep end of the pool, so dive in and experience it. And if you think it's a good idea, it is.

This soliloquy is premised on the notion that Earl has made a success of his various professional ventures. The facts argue against that notion which renders this bit of advice a bit smarmy.

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